

OBITUARY

MR. G. W. LAMBERT, C.B.

The Society's longest serving member, Mr G. W. Lambert, C.B., died on 15 December 1983 shortly after reaching his 94th birthday. He had been a member for 70 years, which is probably a record for the Society. He was co-opted to the Council in 1925, later elected a Council member, was President in 1955-58, appointed Vice-President in 1964 and an honorary member in May, 1979. He also served at times as a joint honorary secretary. The Council gave a sherry party in his honour in 1979 to celebrate his 90th birthday.

In his Presidential address to the Society in 1955 Mr. Lambert described how his interest in psychical research was kindled when he was at the public school (Cheltenham College) where F. W. H. Myers had been some 45 years before and there read his newly published (1903) *Human Personality* in the college library. 'Before I left a memorial to Myers was dedicated in the Chapel and Sir Oliver Lodge delivered the address at the dedication service. These things happened to me at an impressionable age, and I was fired with an ambition to have my own copy of *Human Personality*. It was far outside the reach of my pocket money, and I had the temerity to ask for the work as a prize. Fortunately for me, Myers was considered a prophet in his old school, and I am still the proud possessor of those two volumes, to which I often refer.'

Mr. Lambert's address was devoted to 'The Use of Evidence in Psychical Research' and in it he made the point that a study of places where poltergeist phenomena occurred showed that in countries with a seaboard they were much more likely to happen along the coast, including estuaries and the tidal reaches of rivers, than elsewhere, and if inland, they seemed to favour the sides of valleys with rivers at the bottom. Also, by far the greater number started in the months October to March, as compared with the months April to September.

These considerations caused Mr. Lambert to form his 'Underground Water' theory, which has come in for a certain amount of criticism. For a discussion of different points of view about the theory readers should turn to the *Journal* for September 1961 (vol. 41 No. 709) where the geophysical theory of poltergeists is criticised by A. D. Cornell and Alan Gauld and defended by Mr. Lambert. In their book *Four Modern Ghosts* (London, 1958) E. J. Dingwall and T. H. Hall point out that the Society had information about the seismic theory of noises in hauntings and the effect of underground water affected by tidal action as early as 1897, but the underground water theory was never discussed in detail until Mr. Lambert published his paper in 1955. In *Four Modern Ghosts* the two authors discuss the extraordinary haunting of a house in 'Ousedale' which was, they believe, the first example of a case recorded in detail where the explanation of the mysterious noises was to be sought in a most unusual kind of purely natural phenomena. It is a little unfortunate that in old age Mr. Lambert allowed his belief in the underground water theory to harden into a dogma, but, in my opinion, it is certainly a factor that has to be taken into consideration. Some critics who will not entertain the underground water theory dismiss with it the consideration of various types of natural phenomena, such as the all too common occurrence of mist figured being mistaken for 'ghosts'.

It would be a pity if Mr. Lambert's preoccupation with underground water theory overshadowed the credit that should be given to him for his many scholarly papers on a variety of subjects which include the automatic writing of Mrs. Verrall, Mrs. Holland, and the Mackinnon family of Aberdeen (not Glasgow, as was first thought), and the celebrated Versailles case. He also wrote papers on the Dieppe Raid Case, with the late Hon. Mrs. Kathleen Gay, and on the haunting of Beaver Lodge. One of his most notable achievements was his analysis of the evidence in the Versailles Case which may be found in my summary of the case in *Hauntings and Apparitions* (London, 1982). Lambert certainly did not expect to find that evidence could later be produced in support of what Miss Moberly and Miss Jourdain said they saw in the gardens in 1901, provided that the period involved was 1770-71 and not 1789, as the two ladies thought, basing their belief, for which there was no evidence, that the 'sketching lady' seen in the park was the apparition of Marie Antoinette.

Mr. Lambert's mind was essentially practical, which was to be expected from someone who held the high position of Under Secretary of State at the War Office from 1938 to 1951. In his researches he was helped by his knowledge of genealogy: he was elected a Fellow of the Irish Genealogical Research Society in 1970. I first met him in 1960 when I was researching material for a series of articles that encouraged me to write my first book on psychical research *The Unexplained* (London, 1966). Other books followed and in researching these I could always turn to him for help and advice: what little knowledge I have of this perplexing subject I owe largely to him. Not only did he have a thorough knowledge of the history of psychical research but, what is much rarer, he knew what was in our voluminous archives and could quote case after case in support of a contention. Other visitors to the Society's premises had the same help when he came to 'the office' daily after his retirement. Combined with this knowledge was an innate modesty and courtesy and complete integrity. People with his gifts and standards are rare in any learned society, and in the death of Guy Lambert the Society has lost a most distinguished figure and I a friend. Mrs. Lambert, who was only a year younger than her husband, died earlier in 1983.

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